



STATE OF ALABAMA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Michael Sentance, J.D., LL.M.  
State Superintendent of Education

August 17, 2017

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Dr. W. L. Holladay, III, Superintendent  
Athens City Board of Education  
455 U. S. Highway 31 North  
Athens, AL 35611-2653

Dear Dr. Holladay:

As you know, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) has had concerns regarding the virtual student component of Athens City Schools' (ACS) enrollment and has withheld funding pending validation of the related data. The ALSDE has been contacted on several occasions by representatives of private schools and others across the state with concerns regarding offers made to private school students to enroll in the Athens Renaissance School. Through these inquiries, we have been led to understand that, in exchange for enrollment and access to virtual content provided through Athens Renaissance School, the private school is offered a per student allotment as well as a laptop for each student enrolled.

In an effort to confirm the accuracy of the enrollment data reported by ACS, we obtained enrollment information from one such private school that has reportedly partnered with ACS in the manner described above. A review was conducted on a sample of students for compliance with the Virtual School Law. The results of this review showed that students appear to be simultaneously enrolled in both the private school and Athens Renaissance School as well as included in the funded ADM for ACS. This is in conflict with the Virtual School Law and calls into question the legitimacy of a significant portion of the 2017 funded ADM reported by ACS.

The validity of reported enrollment is the responsibility of the local school system. If you have information that differs from our findings and verifies legal compliance for all virtual enrollees, we offer the opportunity for ACS to provide this evidence.

Innovation is at the center of improvement in public education. Without the imagination and courage to promote new ideas, we will never move forward to advance our understanding of what works in schools. I stand with many who admire your willingness to think broadly and creatively. However, we need to operate within the parameters of law. In light of our findings thus far, we will need to consider, among other things, an extrapolation of disallowed ADM and corresponding consequences in funding.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael Sentance  
State Superintendent of Education

MS/AC/EK

GOVERNMENT  
EXHIBIT

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